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Summary:

Cavaillé-Coll and Holland, An Inquiry into the Work of Cavaillé-Coll and his Influence in the Netherlands in the Period 1875-1924

In 1844 the young Paris organ builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll (1811-1899) explored several European organ workshops. During a three day stay in the Netherlands he visited organs in Rotterdam, Haarlem and Utrecht, as well as the famous Bätz-workshop. Although he admired the skilful and solid work of this builder, he missed the spirit of innovation and progress which he had previously experienced in Switzerland and Germany.

The novelties Cavaillé-Coll had implemented three years earlier in the organ of Saint-Denis, in France considered as an instrument on the edge of two style eras, had earned him a firm reputation. In the Netherlands, however, his name remained unknown for the following thirty years. During a return visit to Paris in 1846, Bätz' companion Chr.G.F. Witte studied the organs of Saint-Denis and La Madeleine and, as an experiment, incorporated some of Cavaillé's inventions in a new instrument in the Rotterdam Zuiderkerk. Nevertheless, organ building in the Netherlands remained traditional and provincial.

This lack of innovation did not only apply to organ building, but to many other industrial branches, as became clear from the Dutch contribution to the 'Great Exhibition' in London in 1851. Belgium got ahead of the Netherlands in the field of industry. The organ export of renowned houses like Merklin, Walcker and Cavaillé-Coll expanded worldwide, but Dutch builders took no part in this development. They ignored the innovations and the fame the Cavaillé-Coll-firm earned with instruments in St.-Sulpice, Notre-Dame and other Parisian main churches.

This lack of interest in French organ art must be viewed in the light of the German supremacy in the musical field, which influenced the repertoire as well as the musical education throughout the 19th century. Non-theatrical French music was hardly ever played in the Netherlands and the Belgian-French renaissance of Bach-music, led by Lemmens, was ignored completely, thus nipping in the bud any interest in French organ culture.

The influence of Charles-Marie Philbert (1826-1894), the French consul in the Netherlands, has been of crucial importance to the, albeit modest, spreading of French romantic organ aesthetics. Besides his training for the diplomatic service, he was trained as an organ builder at Cavaillé's workshop. After his first post in Den Helder, in those days the Amsterdam outport, he moved to Amsterdam in 1864. There he was an important adviser in the building of the Adema-organ in the Mozes and Aäron church. The purpose of Philbert's intervention in Dutch organ building was twofold: propagating the French workmanship and art of organ playing as well as interesting the conventional Dutch organ builders in modern French developments.

In the second half of the 19th century the city of Amsterdam, after years of decline, regained some of its former reputation as one of the most important commercial centres in the world. Trade prospered and there was a complete transformation in architecture following the approach of the famous Paris prefect Hausmann. One of the finest examples of modern architecture was the 'Paleis voor Volksvlijt' (Industry Palace). Musical performances there and in the 'Parkzaal' were very well attended. The revival of the Amsterdam musical culture gloriously resulted in the building of the Concertgebouw and the establishing of its famous orchestra in 1888.

It was also a prosperous time for the Roman Catholic church. After the rehabilitation of the episcopal hierarchy in the Netherlands in 1853, new churches in neo-gothic-, neo-renaissance and neo-baroque style were built in Amsterdam. From 1860 onwards organ

builders set up three-manual instruments in the St.-Willibrordus binnen de Veste church (Smits, 1864-1882), the Mozes and Aäron church (Adema, 1871-1887) and the St.-Nicolaas church (Sauer, 1889). Large instruments were also built for the Paleis voor Volksvlijt (Cavaillé-Coll, 1875), the Old Lutheran Church (Witte, 1885) and the Concertgebouw (Maarschalkerweerd, 1891). Three of these instruments were manufactured in French-romantic style and thus influenced to some extent the development of Dutch workmanship and the art of organ playing.

On the occasion of its tenth anniversary in 1874, the board of the Paleis voor Volksvlijt decided to purchase a concert organ to extend the possibilities of musical performances. Initially, there were negotiations with the German organ builder Strobel, but Philbert succeeded in convincing the board to purchase from Cavaillé-Coll. Foreign organists like Best, Gevaert, Lemmens, Guilmant and the board of the Albert Hall in Sheffield, where Cavaillé-Coll had installed a large organ the year before, were asked for their opinion about the Paris organ builder. Problems regarding the high purchase price and the delivery time were solved by Philbert and A.C. Wertheim, a member of the supervisory board of the Paleis voor Volksvlijt. The 'Association for the advancement of organ music in Amsterdam' was founded. This association enabled the purchase of a completed organ by means of a debenture loan. This organ, a twin of the instrument in the St.-Pierre Cathedral in Lisieux, had been used for demonstration purposes in the Cavaillé-Coll workshop in avenue du Maine.

After Cavaillé-Coll's failed efforts to sell the organ to a Paris concert hall, it was now readily available for Amsterdam. With this order, thirty years after his European tour, Cavaillé-Coll at long last established his reputation in Holland. In April 1875 a commission consisting of Jos. Verheijen, organist of the Mozes and Aäron church, Palace conductor Joh. Coenen and Philbert, examined and bought the instrument. It was assembled in the summer and inaugurated by Guilmant by the end of October.

Being the driving force behind this project, Philbert formed a small group consisting of Amsterdam citizens who shared his ideas. The Van Ogtrop brothers and the organists Verheijen and B.A. Hendrik were members of this group. New orders for the Sint-Bernard hospice and the St.-Augustinus church followed soon. Dutch organ builders like Witte and Maarschalkerweerd greatly respected Cavaillé's style. Because of his full order book Witte even advised the authorities of the Waalse Kerk in The Hague to purchase from Cavaillé-Coll. The fact that Philbert's sons were educated at the St.-Willibrord College in Katwijk was the reason Cavaillé-Coll obtained his last order for the Netherlands there.

After 1875 French music for chamber- and full orchestra (Berlioz, Lalo, Saint-Saëns, d'Indy, Massenet and Franck) was played by Richard Hol, Willem Kes, Julius Röntgen and Willem Mengelberg. Though this development coincided with growing interest in French organ culture in Holland, there is no evidence that this phenomenon was influenced by the marginal French organ culture in Holland. The Guilmant recitals in the Paleis voor Volksvlijt in 1875 resulted in many interpretations of his music on Dutch instruments. Widor and Lefébure-Wély were played often too, quite contrary to Franck's organ compositions, which were not played until the early 20th century.

Dutch organists, except for promoters of French music like Verheijen, Hendrik de Vries, B.A. Hendriks and C.F. Hendriks jr., did not play the Cavaillé-Coll organ in the Amsterdam Palace. In the last quarter of the 19th century mainly Belgian organists like Mailly and some of his pupils, and French masters like Widor, Vierne and Saint-Saëns were invited to give recitals in the Palace. In 1879 Mailly's protégé Jean-Baptiste de Pauw (1852-1924) was appointed as the official organist of the Paleis voor Volksvlijt. He resigned sixteen years later. In 1884 he was a co-founder of the Amsterdam Conservatory and until his death he taught piano and organ. From 1895 onwards he used the Concertgebouw-organ for this

purpose. Yet it shows from his concerts in the Paleis voor Volksvlijt, that he was no passionate promoter of French organ music. It was not until 1912 that his pupil Rootlieb played a Franck-composition at the final exams. Later on some of De Pauw's pupils (Evert Cornelis, Louis Robert, Hendrik Andriessen, Jacob Bijster and Jan Nieland) caused a breakthrough for French organ music in the Netherlands.

This book covers the period from 1875 till 1924, half a century of French organ music in the Netherlands, starting with the acquisition of the Cavaillé-Coll organ for the Amsterdam Paleis voor Volksvlijt and ending in 1924 with the death of two representatives of a new organ aesthetic: Jean-Baptiste de Pauw and Jos. Verheijen.
(with gratitude to Carla Maessen)